

**Linda Clair**  
**Seven-day Meditation Retreat**  
**Kallara Conference Centre – September 2019**  
**Transcription from Audio Recordings**

**File 6b – Thursday morning discussion session**

Question: I wanted to ask you about breathing. I'm finding that what you said about deep breaths and focusing down into the hara is really good. I find I'm able to stay more focused if I keep doing that. If extend my breath and breathe a bit deeper it helps me to stay with the body a bit more. But I'm wondering if I interfere with the normal breath to that extent?

Linda: First, don't focus on it. Don't focus on anything to the exclusion of something else. Use it more as your primary attention – you keep coming back to it. But don't try and hang on to it. There will be times when it will be all there is, just the breath coming in and out, and it will feel quite effortless. Other times you'll have to be more deliberate and firm with it to really bring your attention back. So it'll change.

It's not about controlling the breath. It's being firm with it and being very aware of it but not trying to control it or having it going at some certain speed or whatever. And often when there's more energy coming into the body you'll need to breathe more deeply to be able to stay stable. And other times it will be very light.

With most people – what you'd call normal breathing – people breathe from up here. They don't really breathe deeply into their bodies. Babies do and young children do. But as we get older it tends to come up here and we tend to become obsessed with just staying up here, and there's this fear and resistance of going deeply into the body.

So yes, that's fine. But don't try and use it to push things away or get away from anything – it's just to stabilise you.

Question: Yes, it seems to keep me more in the body if I breathe deeper. And also if I'm experiencing intense sensation it helps me to deal with that better.

Linda: That's what it's for. It just softens it slightly.

Question: I also wanted to ask you about what you said on the first day, that all pain is fear.

Linda: I don't think I said that. I don't say all pain is fear. I don't know what I said but I wouldn't have said all pain is fear. Maybe I said there's a degree of most pain that's people's fear, there's a degree of fear in that. So when the fear goes there are some pains that you used to feel before that, in my experience, I don't feel anymore, they're just gone. But at the time that I used to feel them, they felt completely real, "This is my pain, this is definitely a pain" – particularly when you're sitting. When I was young I tended to get headaches – that just went. So a lot of that must have been emotional tension, fear.

When I feel pain now, most of the time, it's just not as strong. I might hit myself and I just hardly feel it, not to the degree that I felt it before. So you're still going to feel pain but there won't be that suffering. There'll still be some pain. While you're in the body, that's how it is, there's going to be pain. I'm not against painkillers or anything like that if you really feel to. But now I very, very rarely take painkillers, just because I don't need to. But if I needed to of course I would.

Question: I also use some words to keep me focused when I was having intense sensation as well.

Linda: When you say focused, what you mean by that?

Question: On the body. Not wanting to escape the sensation in the body through thinking. Trying to stay with it. I found that quite helpful whereas the counting, I found frustrating because part of my mind was able to count while the other part was able to run away and think. So I'd find myself counting fine but not being aware of the counting anymore. So I was breathing in and saying to myself, "Calm body and mind," and breathing out and saying to myself, "Present moment," and just using that.

Linda: Did that help. (It did.) Anything that helps is fine. When you're counting make sure you count from down here with your body, not so much with your head. Do it very deliberately with your body. But if that sort of mantra helps do it; anything that keeps you in your body.

Question: I find myself at work spending long hours with my mind totally absorbed into a particular task. Time flies when I'm doing this but I'm aware my mind is not rehashing the past. On the other hand, I'm not aware of what I'm doing either. I'm not sure what the state that is and how an enlightened being would be if you're totally absorbed into something. Would you still have part of your awareness watching what you're doing?

Linda: Well, I can only speak for me – I never really get totally absorbed in anything else. It's a bit more like an animal – it looks like the dog is asleep but you make a noise and you realise their ears are up listening, so it's a bit like that. You can't focus on anything really anymore.

I'd say when you're working you're not totally in your mind, you're watching, you're doing something, you're very aware of what you're doing. So you're not totally in your head, particularly when you don't notice time passing. That's why people do things that they do become totally absorbed in, because they forget about themselves. And time, it goes, you don't notice it. The state that I'm in now is in that state where no, I don't notice time so much. Occasionally, but it's not this linear progression anymore, it's not linked up.

Thinking produces this idea that time is a progression – there's a past and a future and you're going along in this line. But when you stop thinking there's only now, that's how it is. Things aren't in this progression anymore, it's all happening at once. So you can't get focused on any one thing because it's all happening now. So you naturally stay super-alert most of the time.

It's not that I can't do anything, I do lots of things, but it's different. I can't just focus in to one thing. If I'm talking to you I can hear noises around, I can see around, rather than just focusing on you – I just can't do that anymore. The senses do change, they change from being single-pointed focused to just wide, 180 degree awareness.

Question: Yesterday you were saying it could be a good idea that when I'm in the thick of things to break it up. I realise there is resistance to leaving that bubble of focus. Would that help?

Linda: It would really help, it would really help. You'll get back into it again, you won't lose anything. It will stop that momentum. You're actually more efficient when you're not in that incredible momentum, "I've got to get this done!" and you get really excited about it. You do become much more efficient because your head's not full of all this unnecessary stuff and memories. And you become much more creative, purely creative, because you're not working the past. You're working from now and now is the only thing that's purely creative. If you're working from your past experiences it's partly repetition.

Question: My fear is that when I'm absorbed in those tasks I'm in that train of thought, and if I break it it's a big effort to go back into it, particularly when it's a creative task.

Linda: Try it. And as I said, no train of thought is purely creative. You think it is, and you think you can't live and can't be creative without thinking, but the opposite is actually true. So experiment with it, do it. Do it a number of times during the day. Sure there'll be deep resistance, because your mind wants you to stay in that momentum and train of thought. So try it. Set a time or something and just make yourself get up and just walk around the room or walk outside without thinking about what you're doing, just break it, breathe, do something. You can do it!

Are you dying to say something? How are you doing?

Question: I'm a little bit conflicted, especially with what you just said. It really makes me want to resist practicing anymore. (laughing)

Linda: Why? Because you want to keep thinking?

Question: Yes. What I imagined is studying for most of my life and devoting myself to a field where I would need a lot of memories or rehashing stuff that I've already learned. But if I choose to go this path – which I already have and can't stop now – I'm wondering where that leaves that part of things?

Linda: You never know. You don't know. There are people here who are academics and professionals and working in all sorts of different things. You can do it – much more effectively in some ways. I don't know what you want to do but you might change too. How old are you? (Just twenty-one.) What are you studying? (Genetics) Don't be scared. It's not like you have to give up everything now. Do it gradually. (laughter in the room) Why was that funny?

Don't worry about it. People are so scared, they go, "I'm really fearful of what's going to happen." There's no fear! So you're scared of not feeling fear, that's the thing, it's what's so crazy about it.

Question: I know. I found that as well, especially when you said this morning that this is one of the last days of the retreat. It made me realise, "Oh my god, I'm not going to be here forever!" I really want to do this all the time.

Linda: Well, you can but you can also study as well. It can make it at times a bit tricky, a bit tedious, but it is anyway. It's not like you have to give up everything for this, right now. And you don't become a vegetable. (laughter) I do lots of stuff, have a normal active life in a way. But don't worry about it.

Question: Yes, I think it's mostly from the fear of the unknown because I don't know what it's like.

Linda: No, you don't. You don't know what it's like but you're scared of something that you don't know. I'm just saying, in the unknown there's no fear because there's nothing to fear. It's all unknown. All you're scared of is what's already happened. That's all you can be scared of, repeating some past experience. In the unknown, there's no fear.

I was going to say, someone who is often at these retreats has meditation sessions at RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology,) Wednesdays I think at lunch time. So if you're around it might be nice going to that. I'll give you his details and you can contact him. And he's a lecturer at RMIT, so there's someone else.

Question: I got into meditating because I read that book by Sam Harris, in neurosciences. It's good.

Linda: I've heard of him but I haven't read it.

Question: It seems stupid now that I was scared. But I'm still scared. It's so stupid.

Linda: Everyone's scared.

Question: The way of putting your foot on the ground that P. showed us (for walking meditation,) it's a hard thing to say but it kind of takes away something because I usually bang my heel on the floor. But we now have the new way of putting your toes down first and it somehow takes away my foot's entitlement. It's like the floor received the foot instead of the foot banging down on the floor.

Linda: It really makes a difference doesn't it.

Question: I felt it was quite a profound difference to have my foot received by a floor rather than me...

Linda: ... stamping your foot on the floor, "Here it is floor, here's my foot!" (laughter)

Question: It was quite a strong turn around. Then I thought, "Try having your shower from the belly." And when I tried that, instead of me washing myself with my hands, my body felt my hands washing it. It was like there was a stranger in the shower. (laughter)

Linda: And do that when you're cooking too. It's really interesting when you start to do it when you're cooking and everything comes alive suddenly. It's like they're all walking around. (laughing) It's really interesting.

Question: Yes, you really notice on the retreat, doing the chopping, how the things fall apart with the knife.

Question: I haven't really got a question but I'll say something about what's been happening. Sunday I had a disturbed arriving-Sunday. But then Monday morning I had what I can't help calling a good sit where I could be present with my breath in my belly, grounded in a deeper way than I ever have and just watching the speed of the "me," the thoughts, the images coming around. I remember thinking, "Oh good, I know how to do this now. I'll do this the rest of the retreat." (laughing) Of course I was completely exhausted by that. So the rest of Monday I was fighting sleepiness and it was a bit of a slog, and I couldn't really quite get back as deeply until Wednesday morning, when I had a bit with a lot of energy, and then again this morning. So when I look back on that, I've watched my frustration at my kind of 'failure' to be there as much as I'd like to be. But on the other hand I'm also incredibly grateful for the practice. And I've heard what you say about, "Just keep going," and I thought, "Well, I know I can do that!" So that's what I'm left with. It will come and go and will go, and sometimes I can do it and sometimes I can't.

Linda: There'll be reactions and there'll be tiredness. Just go with the changes rather than resisting them and imposing how you feel it should be, and what you feel is a deep meditation, and what you want to repeat and what you don't want to repeat – just let it go. You just have to go in, "Okay, anything could happen," you really don't know. But keep going.

Question: Similarly, I don't really have a question. I just want to talk about what's been happening. You were talking to someone about being tested, in the practice you might feel tested. I feel like I've been really tested for the last few years, something's really thrown me. In this retreat there's been some kind of examination of that or dropping down into some of that. Being confronted by the ways I tried to hide myself or cut off this fear reaction – I've been going through that. Yesterday afternoon something became apparent about it and there was some compassion for myself in that. Whatever that was, I felt like there was something to it and felt curious where that would go. I went for a walk with T. after dinner and on the way back, I had the feeling I'd cut myself off from myself, from the practice, from you, from T., from the people around me. I was suddenly aware of how afraid I am of being loved. And something was happening in me. We were walking back and I started crying, a really deep bodily crying. I cried in T.'s arms and stood in the middle of the road, trying not to make too much noise. (laughter) I was determined to get back for the meditation but realised I wasn't done yet and started crying again in my room. It was like I was watching my body do it because I didn't want to wail and draw attention to myself. I was hyperventilating, and it kept coming. Then I tried to clean myself up and run in here after the Heart Sutra and hope that no one saw the mess I was in, and sat through that sitting. I was absolutely stuffed. Then I went back to my room and started crying again... Then I was exhausted and went to sleep, and woke up around midnight in a state of disorientation and panic and paranoia, and it was bloody awful. I came out of weird dreams and I having strange visions with changing pictures which were sinister and unsettling. I told T., "I'm not feeling very good. I can see things in front of my eyes. I'm losing it a little..." I was dizzy. I went back to bed and felt awful. I was really spooked, scared and thought I was losing my mind and didn't trust myself and what was going on, a very peculiar experience... and sort of a panic. I forced myself to come down for the morning sitting, and felt tired but really clear... and then trying to analyse it a bit.

Linda: How do you feel now?

Question: Pretty clear. It became apparent I was sort of looking for something like, "What's changed now, after I had this big cry and something went through me?" Then I realised there's no point.

Linda: You'll notice something later that's changed. So yes, you are losing your mind, that's the thing. But that's not how you'll end up. That's the way it's portrayed: if you lose your mind you go crazy and you feel really unstable. But that's why it's so important to practice like this in the way that we're doing because it's your safety net. But sometimes there's going to be a huge release like that – it's a big emotional release. Don't worry, you won't go crazy. I don't see any sign of craziness in you, nothing really. And it's great you had T. there as your anchor.

Question: She helped me connect with it as well. Her love helped me peer over that edge of the fear.

Linda: Yes. So no, you're not crazy, you're not unstable, you're fine. But things like that are going to happen. I had quite a few things like that happening.

Question: It's kind of familiar as well. I've been in that kind of place before.

Linda: It's like the dam bursts. You can't hold it in anymore and something has to give.

Question: Yes, and think after it gave I was just disoriented. You kind of get rearranged a bit.

Linda: Yes, well that's a good way of putting it because everything gets – well, it doesn't get rearranged – it gets wiped out and it's just new. There's space, nothing takes its place. And maybe that's what you're looking for, something to take its place.

Question: Yes, and I think some of that was some of my framework, that thing that I cried out informed a lot of the way I related to people and myself. So without that there's a grasping for what isn't there.

Linda: Yes. You do get completely cleared out in the end so there isn't that fear of being loved or judged or anything. It doesn't mean people won't still judge you. They will, but you just don't care, it doesn't matter. You just feel clear. And every now and again you see a spot and you go, "Hmm, there's a little bit," and then it goes as soon as you see it.

Question: What was also interesting, it's been a rough ride to get to that. I've struggled immensely but it doesn't quite have the same drama that my struggle used to have. I can get there and I can trust. I suppose I feel more resolute because I know I can face whatever's in me.

Linda: That's what this whole practice does. It strengthens you to the point where you know you can handle it. It will still affect you but you know you can handle it.

Question: Yes, I think it's just a matter of hanging in. That's what it was, I just hung in there. Things came up that for a long time I couldn't see a way through and was worried there wasn't a way through. But I suppose, although I gave up in some way, I never really did. So that's nice to know.

Linda: No, you're still here. Thanks, M. I'm sure everyone can relate to what you said. It's good expressing it like that, something so private. And maybe those who are next door know what was going on now. (laughter)

Question: I can totally relate to what M. was talking about, the whole emotional thing, because this is the first time in doing any process or group thing where I actually contemplated walking out, it got that intense. The thing that's been bugging me, I went back to my room and that's where the emotion usually comes out, crying or whatever. This time in the room it's zip shut, or head stuff happens, "Okay, alright, blah, blah, blah." But when I'd come back in here to sit the past couple of days I just had to cry. I felt this incredible rage, anger. I had to go, "Okay, I'm angry. Let's approach this from an emotional point of view instead of breath, breath, breath," and I went into a pre-verbal space, something primal. I'm really glad I did and trusted that instinct to follow that through. At the end there I was a complete mess but that was heart, hara, it was pre-verbal. It was all about being touched and being loved. You used to go around and put your hands on people and I could see myself putting hands up and say, "No, don't touch me," and it spiralled from there. I love that work where you follow the emotion and breathe into it.

Linda: It's probably not so much following the emotion, just following your primal instinct.

Question: Yes, whichever way you want to express it – exactly. I had no words for it, it was just totally primal. But it's odd that it happens in the group. And the fine line of realising, "What do I do with this energy? Do I put it back into the breathing and contain it and let it go in? Or do I just sink with it?" There's no rules really, you just have to trust. I totally relate to what M. was talking about. And it feels really, really good to do it. Apart from it being a release, it is a clearing out. All those cells get cleared with it. I've experienced that many times with breath work. And even here in other previous retreats.

Linda: You alright B.?

Question: Well, I was brought up in the country. The culture was that every person you met, you greeted. You said hello, you acknowledged them some way or other, you didn't just pass them by. Of course here we're not to be greeting people, we're not to be looking at people. I've always found that very hard. I have a tendency to look at people and maybe say something. This morning I woke with a puffy eye. It was quite closed up. I think it's still pretty bad. So you may all want to come and look at my eye. (laughter) So I was very happy to avoid people this morning. It was quite nice actually. I wouldn't look at people. I put my head down and walked past. So it works quite well avoiding people. I just couldn't do it before because of my upbringing, or other reason.

Linda: Out normally, it can be nice to do that but here it can be good to not have to do that, so you don't have to be anyone, you don't have to be polite. You don't even have to look at them. It gives you a certain freedom.

Question: Yes, it does give you some freedom. I can remember when I first came from the country to Adelaide I used to go to the city and I'd come home with a headache because I wanted to greet every person and there were all these people in the street that you had to meet. (laughter) That's quite a burden when you've got that in your mind.